

BOOK CLUB | MILTOM HATOUM | *THE BROTHERS* | 19<sup>th</sup> APR 2018, 6.30~9 PM

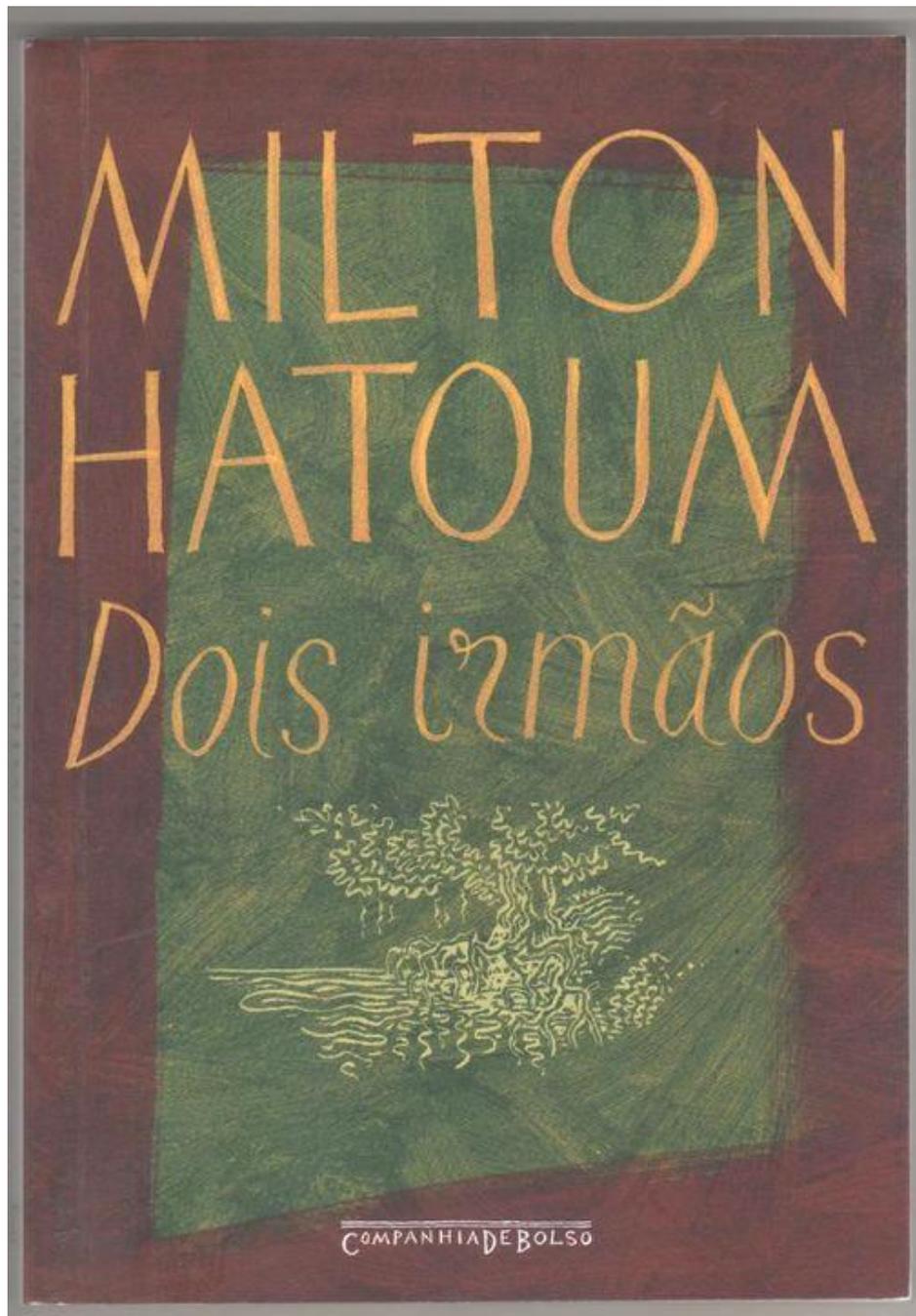
2018 – The year of reading Brazilian Literary Greats & unlocking the power of our minds!

MILTON HATOUM (1952- )

*Dois Irmãos* (2000)

translated into English as

*The Brothers* (2002/3)

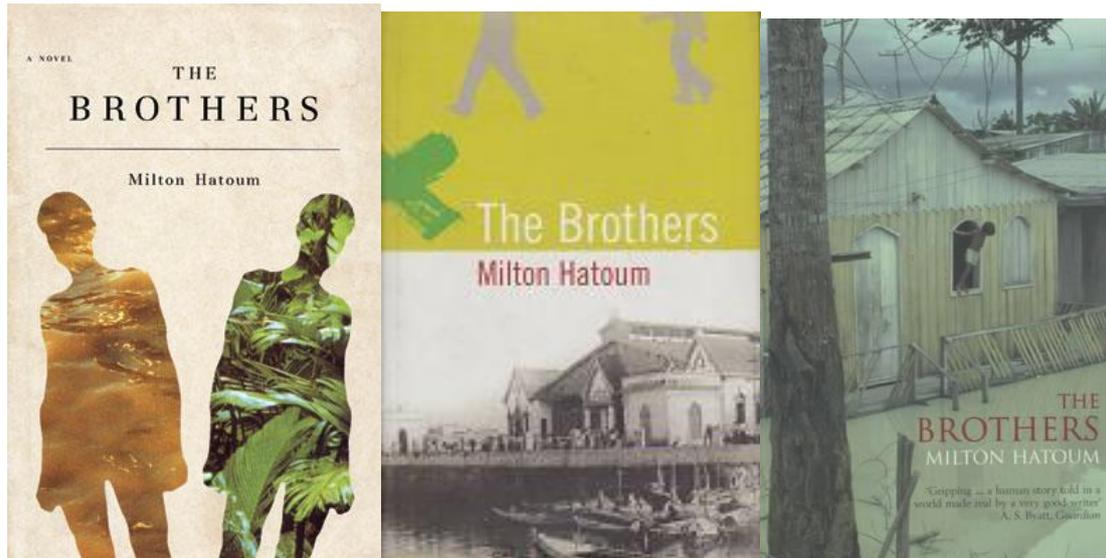


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Echoes of ancient archetypal rivalries of twins in timeless universal tales.

Milton Hatoum's twins spawn jealousy and hatred,  
with the tragic incest ambiguity ...

A sequel perhaps to *Relato de um Certo Oriente*\* (1989)  
& revisiting timeless story-telling:

Jacob and Esau in the *Genesis*, Castor and Pollux in Greek and Roman mythology,  
twins in Arabian and Indian mythology and  
*Esaú e Jacob* (1904) by Machado de Assis?

A dysfunctional Lebanese immigrant family  
with an added complication of two religions Maronite and Muslim set in a bustling  
and decaying Manaus post 'black gold' rush (rubber) in that natural idyllic Garden of  
all our Imaginations – the Amazon Forest!

Find out about the power of Ghazals –  
Arabic verse form dealing with loss and romantic love embraced by medieval Persian  
poets – an example of the migration of ancient oral literature forms, which  
(im)migrants carry to distant lands with them.

The tale of Hatoum's twin brothers is narrated by a character Nael (perhaps Nayel or  
even Nathaniel?) and hints at the conundrum of how memories are made and retold –  
BUT ... are they reliable?

Or is it an autobiographical narrative of an embittered author at a particular juncture  
in his life?

\*Translated as *The Tree of the Seventh Heaven* (1994) in the US & *A tale of a certain orient* (2007) in  
the UK

DETAILS OF AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS:

ENGLISH

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(2002) *The Brothers*, translated by John Gledson, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC: London & revised edition in 2003 ISBN-10: 0747562717 ISBN-13: 978-0747562719

## PORTUGUESE

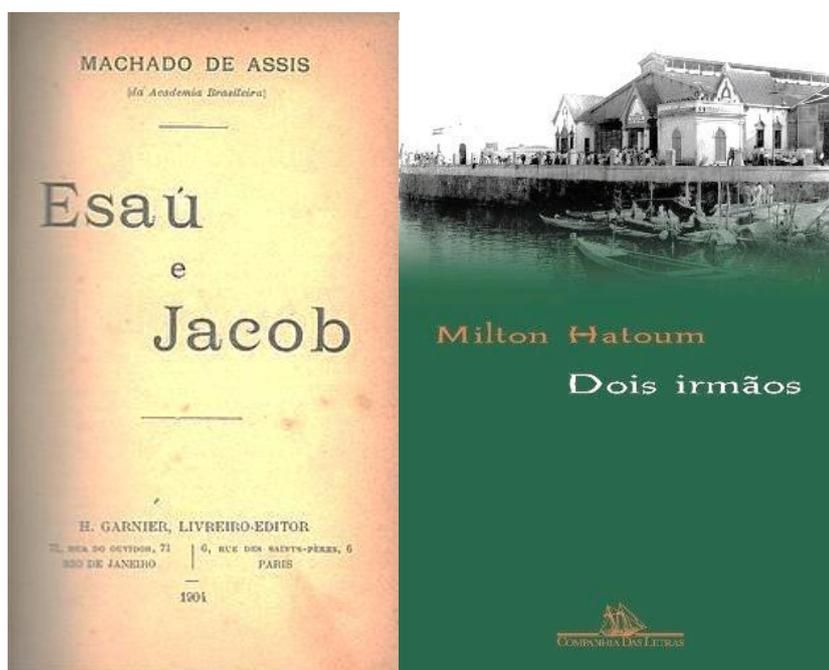
(2000) *Dois Irmãos* - Companhia das Letras: S. Paulo  
ISBN 9788535900132 ISBN-10: 8535908331 ISBN-13: 978-8535908336

## Various editions

### SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATION

In the various interviews granted by Milton Hatoum in which he refers to how he wrote *Dois Irmãos*, published in 2000, the author makes specific reference to the influence of *Esaú e Jacob* (1904) by Machado de Assis, regarded as one of his greatest novels in which the unforgettable character - Counsellor Ayres - features and also foreshadows the 1908 novel *Memorial de Ayres*, which our book club discussed in February this year.

In *Esaú e Jacob*, Machado de Assis (notice how Machado replaces the original biblical order of names) is an allegorical tale, set in Rio de Janeiro at the close 19th century at the time when Brazil was undergoing a conflicted period in its history with monarchy being displaced by a republican government.



In addition, Hatoum certainly read Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909), author of the seminal *Os Sertões: campanha de Canudos* (1902), who was the author who unveiled the Amazon to Brazil at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – he travelled in the Amazon and wrote various official reports and scientific articles about Amazonian affairs collected posthumously in *A margem da História* (1909, Porto: Chardron, Lello, 390 p. il.) in which he referred to the Amazon as a *Lost Paradise* inspired by John Milton (1608-1674). Euclides da Cunha offered a distinctive view from another contemporary publication *Inferno Verde (cenas e cenários do Amazonas)* (1908) by

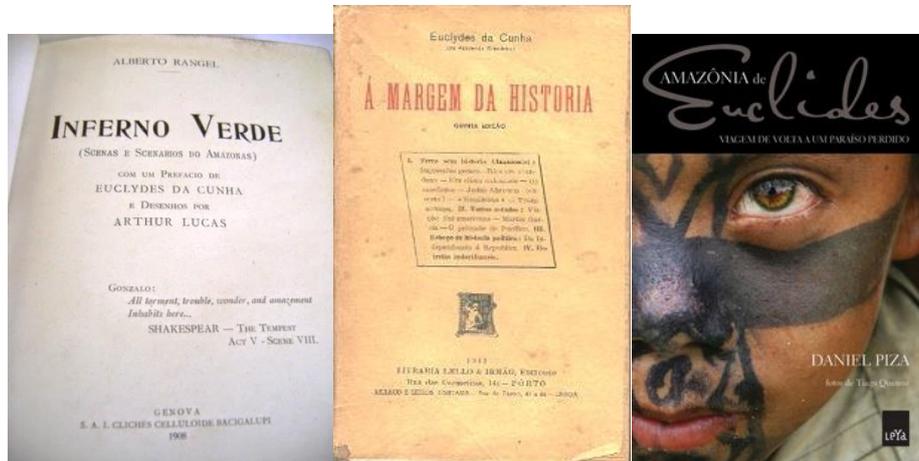
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Alberto do Rego Rangel (1871-1945), also an engineer and writer. Euclides da Cunha wrote the foreword to it. Daniel Piza (1970-2010) retraced the route of an expedition by Euclides da Cunha in 1905 and published *Amazônia de Euclides*, which also contains references to articles published by Euclides da Cunha on Amazonian matters and his anticipation of very modern science – of climate and environment.



Hatoum’s novel is mainly set in Manaus, the Brazilian Amazon and elsewhere beginning just before the World War II. Other places and historical moments make an appearance in the novel. Not least, for example, Yaqub’s stay in South Lebanon for five years and his return to Rio de Janeiro coinciding with the arrival of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) with a few token references to the WWII.

The setting of the novel is based on the appeal of an El Dorado in the Amazonian Forest, which has long lived in the universal consciousness. Fortuitously, the author had spent his childhood years in the Amazon and heard accounts of the immigrants along with his own perceptions within his own family and their immigrant community.

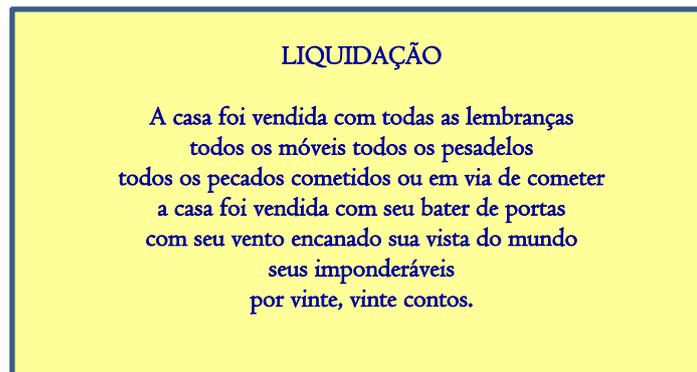
Manaus, the capital of the state had been in a state of decline following the Amazon rubber boom (*Ciclo da borracha*) from 1879 to 1912, which had attracted a multiplicity of fortune seekers from everywhere in Brazil and the world. This was the case of the author’s forebears as well. The theme of Lebanese immigration is also present in Hatoum’s first novel *Relato de um certo Oriente (Tales of a Certain Orient)*, published in 1989 and which appeared in US under the title of *The Tree of the Seventh Heaven* – an account of the memories of a large, unruly Lebanese family in the northern state of Amazonas. There are some shared recurrent themes and memories along with tales, which reappear in *Dois Irmãos*.

Milton Hatoum spent a great deal of time writing *Dois Irmãos* and rewrote it some sixteen to twenty-three times over some three years depending to accounts in the various existing interviews of the author. He tends to write some six to eight hours a day producing various drafts.

Noteworthy is the fact that the author had read and claimed that he remembered Machado’s *Esau e Jacó* from his teenage years, which became the basis of his *Dois Irmãos*. The author tells us how the right moment to write the novel came as he left Manaus and moved to São Paulo; the time at which all changed in his life and decided to change jobs giving up his post as a university lecturer. He taught French language and literature at the Manaus University for a period. He also refers to the

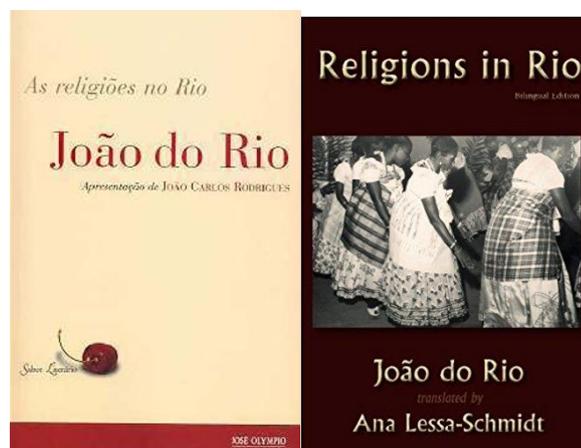
19<sup>th</sup> century French literature, which has various works featuring archetypal twins. He thought of a modern realist novel in drafting his novel. An obvious feature of the novel is that there are confluences between the author's life and the narrative in *Dois Irmãos*; it certainly is a kind of autobiography as well. The author has also argued that his novel is a *Bildungsroman*.

Hatoum also acknowledges other influences not least of story-telling in his own family, a tradition brought by his Lebanese forebears to Brazil. He pays homage to various Brazilian authors and the quotation at the beginning of the novel is from Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902- 1987) from his 1968 poem *Liquidação* from the poetry book *Boitempo* (three volumes) – poetry about memory and recollections in three volumes.



In his narratives, Hatoum interweaves the religious and historical traditions of the Lebanese immigrants to Brazil. His father Hassan was born in the Lebanese village of Beitur. In Manaus, he owned a fabric shop called Esquina das Sedas (Silk Corner) and was deeply interested in Arabic literature. One can find Lebanese immigrants' fabric shops, often selling fine fabrics and silk, some erudite, from the north to the South of Brazil. Hatoum's maternal grandmother was from Batroum, a Maronite Catholic town. The author tells us that, 'My father prayed alone in his room, and it wasn't until I was 12 years old that I realized he was Muslim, because for years he always dropped my mother at church, so I just assumed he was Catholic too.'

It is worth to be reminded of an important record of and sources off the history of Lebanese immigrants to Brazil. More often than not, 'Turk' was the general word to refer to Lebanese, Syrians and Turkish immigrants in Brazil. Authors such as Jorge Amado perpetuated the clichéd misnomer in his novels and Globo Network soap operas, too.

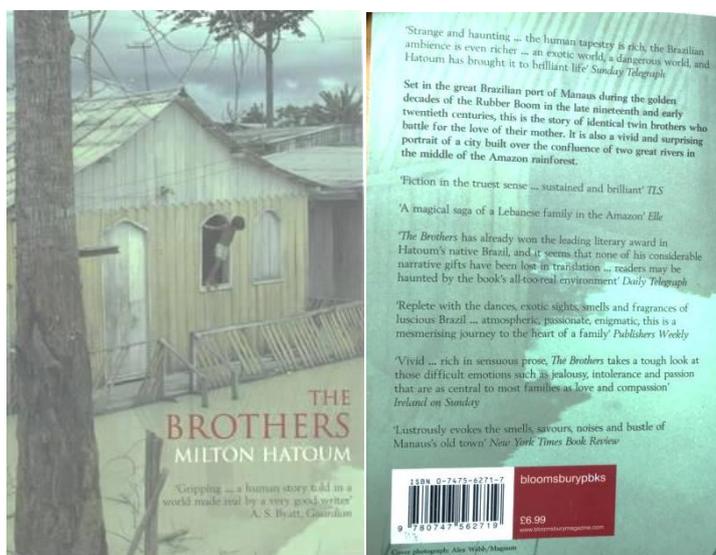


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The third chapter of the 1904 book *As Religiões no Rio* by João do Rio (1881-1921, pen name of João Paulo Emílio Cristóvão dos Santos Coelho Barreto), presents an invaluable early picture of the life of numerous Lebanese immigrants settling in various parts of Brazil including Eastern Orthodox and Maronite Christians and Muslims. Our Book club read and discussed *As Religiões no Rio* in May 2016. The translated text comes in a bilingual edition. Further details can be found in Brazilian Bilingual Book Club post on our website.

His *Dois Irmãos* was translated into English as *The Brothers* by John Gledson (1945-) first in 2002 with a revised edition in 2003. John Gledson is a British translator, literary essayist and a retired lecturer from the University of Liverpool, who had specialized in Brazilian literature. He published translations and critical essays on Machado de Assis and Carlos Drummond de Andrade. He has been visiting Brazil since 1970s. Some of his works were published in Portuguese.



J. Gledson has published both in English and Portuguese, e.g. *The Deceptive Realism of Machado de Assis: A Dissenting Interpretation of Dom Casmurro* (Liverpool Monographs in Hispanic Studies) (1984); translation of the novel *Dom Casmurro* (1998); *Machado de Assis. Impostura e Realismo* (1991); *Influências e Impasses* (2003); a translation *Orphans of Eldorado* (Myths) (2012); translation of Machado de Assis short stories *A Chapter of Hats: Selected Stories* (2014); *Poesia e poética de Carlos Drummond de Andrade* (2018). He has also given interviews, spoken at various conferences and published various articles on Brazilian Literature.



John Gledson's lecture at Semana Machado de Assis June 2007 | Embassy of Brazil | 32 Green Street Mayfair

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The translation *The Brothers* includes a short glossary for some of the Portuguese words. However, essential words such as ‘palafitas’, traditional stilt houses of Amazonian rivers were translated as ‘shacks’ losing a great deal of local flavour. The word was not included in the glossary either. Words such as ‘caçula’ (and diminutive ‘caçulinha’, which can have an ironic or derogatory sense in the original) have more often than not been substituted by the name of the ‘caçula’ – Omar, thus losing some of the tone of the original. The word ‘compadre (feminine –comadre)’ conceptually and culturally rooted with no exact English equivalent - originally, relating to the family-like kinship bonds established between the parents and godparents in the act of christening (Christian) - and if used metaphorically means ‘buddy’, ‘mate’, ‘companion’ or ‘friend’. The term was translated variously as well.

Fruit/plant and animal names have additional layers of meaning including the fact that they are often imbued or encoded through local cultures with local myths and symbolic ceremonial uses. Such names can be a challenge even for Portuguese language speakers from other parts of Brazil or indeed anywhere else. In addition, a particular plant/animal often has various designations as one moves across Brazil – some synonymous while other names are derived from various indigenous languages adding yet another level of complexity. Needless too say, translators are faced with a huge challenge. A botanical/zoological encyclopaedia along with ethnographic/anthropological reference texts are an invaluable and necessary source and tool for any translator as the most commonly available bilingual dictionaries do not bring the names of all plants/animals. In *The Brothers* at times relevant names were mistranslated as is the case of the fruit ‘sorva’ (*Couma utilis*), also known as ‘sorva pequena’, ‘sorvilha’, ‘cumã’, ‘cumai’, ‘saruvina’, ‘gaimaro-macho’, a small fruit which looks somewhat like a guava with the size of a cherry in bunches, from the milk tree. It was translated as star-apple (*Chrysophyllum cainito*), which does not belong to Brazilian flora (chapter 5).

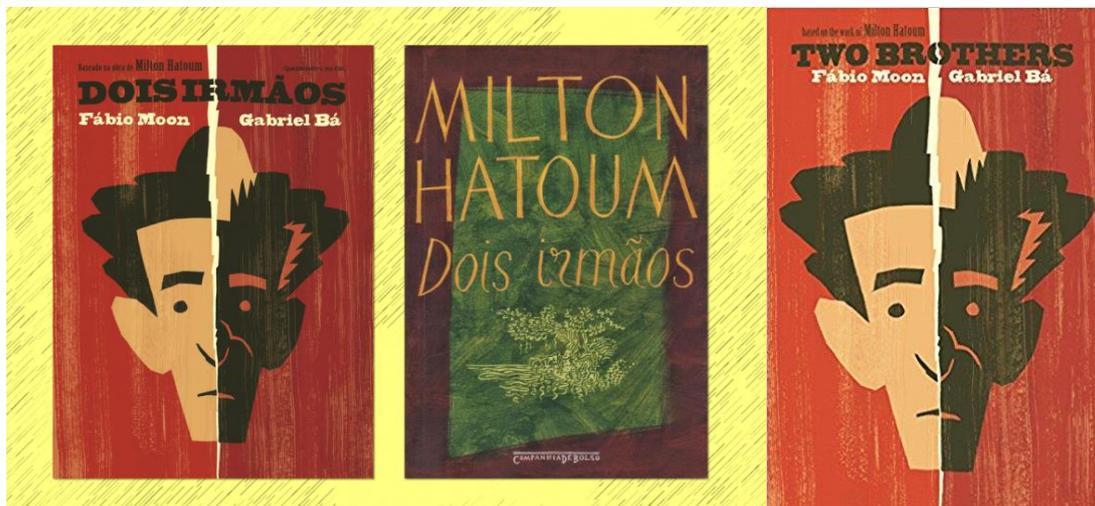


Sorva – star-apple

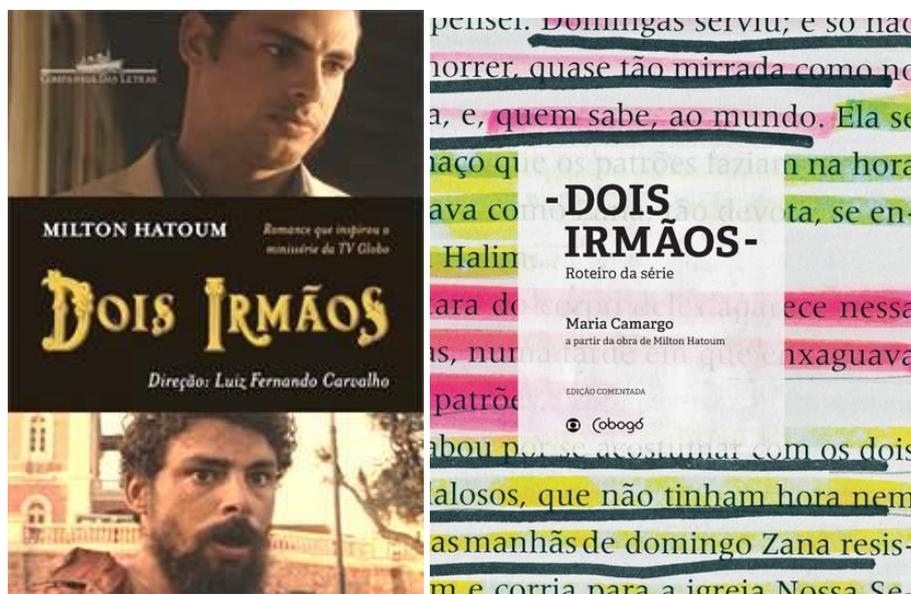
Regrettably some of the gleanings in the glossary are a bit biased and some contain imprecisions, for instance: *cachaça* described as a ‘cheap’ liquor; *copaiba* is not only medicinal as stated there, its oil resin is used as balsam, lacquers and essential oil, mixed with paints for china decoration; *boto* is rendered as white river dolphin but *botos* are of various colours including the famous pink one, native of the Amazon; *pau-mulato* – the scientific name is misspelled not *Calycophyllum* (sic!) but *Calycophyllum spruceanum* and certainly it does not contain any coffee bush!/? <http://www.rain-tree.com/mulaterio.htm#.WsSr8tTwZdg> and zaatar/ za’atar which appears as *thymus vulgaris* is imprecise: za’atar is a condiment, a mixture of hyssop, thyme, oregano, savoury or other similar herbs, sumac and sesame seeds, used in Middle Eastern cooking over millennia with numerous local herbs. The problem of glossaries are a product of the time at which they were produced mirroring the universes of knowledge of their compilers along with inevitable preconceptions/prejudices and can be detrimental to the source language and culture.

*Dois Irmãos* was also translated into other languages: German as *Zwei Brüder* (2002); Arabic - *Chaqiqan* (2003); Spanish *Dos Hermanos* (2003); *Deux frères* (2003), Dutch *Twee Broers* (2004); Italian *Due Fratelli* (2005), Greek *Ta Adéphia* (2005). Only the title in English omits ‘two’ from the original title.

The novel has also been adapted as a comic book or graphic novel by the acclaimed Brazilian comic book artists and graphic novelists Fabio Moon (1976-) and his twin brother Gabriel Ba (1976-) in 2015 and translated into English as *Two Brothers* published in 2015. The twin brothers have a blog <http://fabioandgabriel.blogspot.co.uk>



There is a recent Globo Network TV adaptation (mini series) *Dois Irmãos* premiered on 9<sup>th</sup> January and ended on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017, directed by Luiz Fernando Carvalho (1960-) and written by scriptwriter Maria Camargo (1971 -) based on the novel of the same name by Milton Hatoum. Details in Portuguese are available at <http://gshow.globo.com/series/dois-irmaos/>



## BIOGRAPHY

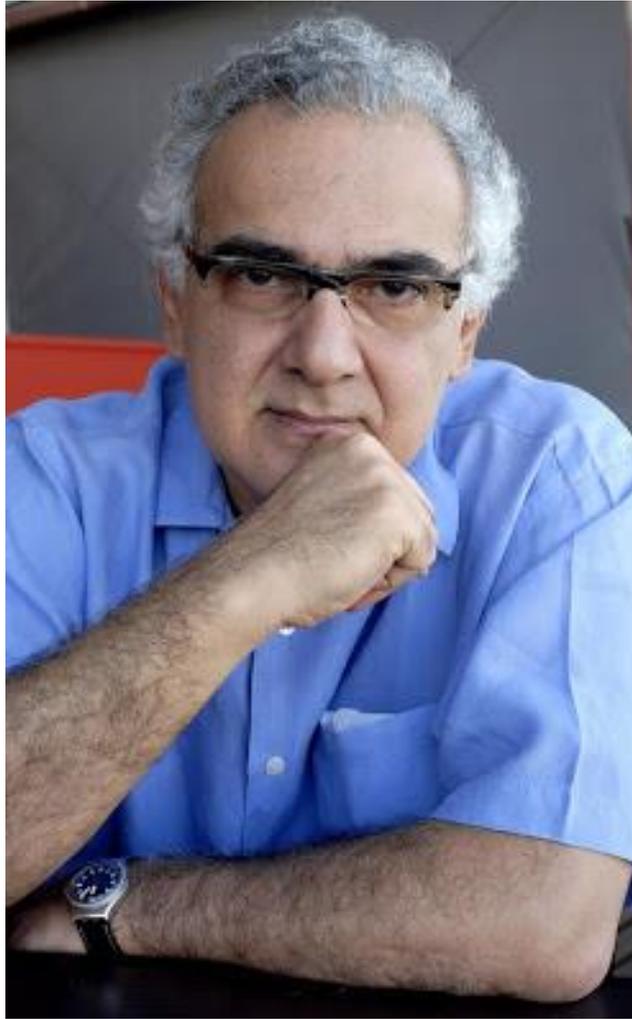
### MILTON HATOUM (1952~ )

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*A biblioteca é um lugar democrático do saber, do conhecimento, na medida em que os livros transmitem saber, conhecimento, permitem viagens imaginárias."*

Milton Hatoum, in "Um Escritor na Biblioteca"  
da BPP/Paraná, edição 2011.

MILTON HATOUM was born on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1952 in Manaus to Lebanese immigrants settled in Brazil. He moved to Brasília in 1958 and attended the Colégio de Aplicação of the University of Brasília and moved to São Paulo in 1970. He started reading architecture and urbanism at the University of São Paulo in 1973 and launched a magazine *Poetação*. After graduating in 1977, he started working as an architect and lecturer and began to write a culture column for the magazine *IstoÉ*. Some of his poems were published in *Amazonas: Palavras e Imagens de um Rio entre Ruínas* (1973).

He was granted a scholarship by the Instituto Iberoamericano de Cooperación in 1980, which enabled him to live in Madrid and Barcelona. In 1981, he moved to France and pursued a degree in Spanish and Latin American Literature at the Paris University III. On his return to Manaus in 1983, he taught French language and literature at the Federal University of Amazonas.

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The Vitae Foundation awarded him a literature scholarship in 1988 to write his first novel *Relato de um Certo Oriente* (1989), which also got the prestigious 1990 Jabuti Prize as the best novel, awarded by the Brazilian Book Chamber. In 1992, the ‘Maison des Ecrivains Étrangers et Traducteurs’ granted him a scholarship and he spent a few months at Saint-Nazaire in France.

Following that, he became a visiting professor at the Berkeley University in California. In 1988, Hatoum returned to São Paulo, writing for *Caderno 2* of the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *Terra Magazine*. Next, in 1999, he began his doctoral research in comparative literature at the University of São Paulo. His novel *Dois Irmãos* was published in 2000 and won the Jabuti prize the following year. His career as a writer took off and he became a celebrated Brazilian author.

His main works are *Relato de um Certo Oriente* (1990); *Dois Irmãos* (2000) *Cinzas do Norte* (2005), *Orfãos do Eldorado* (2008) and book of short stories *A cidade ilhada* (2009). He has also written numerous articles, contributed to anthologies and other publications and, as most Brazilian writers, published translations of foreign literature. He has spoken at various literary events and festivals, including the 2013 Flipside. Milton Hatoum has received various national and international prizes. He has a website in Portuguese: <http://www.miltonhatoum.com.br/>



Sources:

<https://www.companhiadasletras.com.br/autor.php?codigo=00217>

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-brothers-9780747562719/>

<http://www.candido.bpp.pr.gov.br/modules/conteudo/conteudo.php?conteudo=142>

<http://www.portalfeb.com.br/>

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